

Washington State Department of Natural Resources: Land Manager to Aquatic Steward

Carol Piening, Washington State Department of Natural Resources*

Elizabeth Ellis, Washington State Department of Natural Resources

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In 1889, Washington entered the union as a non-riparian state. The Commissioner of Public Lands managed natural resources, and could sell aquatic lands. In 1957, the legislature created the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to manage the state's natural resources. In 1971, the legislature ended the sale of aquatic lands. Today, the state owns about 2.4 million acres of aquatic land; approximately 29 percent of tidelands, 74 percent of shorelands, and nearly all bedlands. In 1984, the legislature stated that state-owned aquatic lands are "a finite natural resource of great value," and directed that DNR manage those lands to provide a balance of public benefits including environmental protection, public use and access, commerce and navigation, use and production of renewable resources, and generating income. DNR issues use authorizations for a number of uses on state-owned aquatic lands, and addresses environmental compliance under a number of environmental regulations. DNR is comprehensively reviewing its management practices, to create a long-term, workable plan that will ensure DNR's management of state owned aquatic lands is in compliance with the Endangered Species Act. The review will occur in three phases: information gathering (which is underway), plan development including public input and review, and implementation.